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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, ISN. JOINT STAFF FOR J5

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [MOPS](#) [CH](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: 2009 U.S.-PRC DEFENSE CONSULTATIVE TALKS (DCT)
SMALL GROUP SESSION (U)

Classified By: Classified by ADCM William Weinstein. Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Lieutenant General Ma Xiaotian, Deputy Chief of the PLA General Staff, stretched what was to be a sixty minute Small Group session with Ms. Michele Flournoy, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USDP), into ninety minutes, and focused his remarks on objecting to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and reconnaissance operations in China's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). End Summary.

¶2. (C) LTG Ma told USDP he had researched her background and read some of her writings. He referenced his role as PLA delegation head during the last DCT with her predecessor Ambassador Eric Edelman, and expressed willingness to work with her to exchange views on a range of issues, including the importance and necessity of developing the military-to-military relationship, and removing barriers and problems. Secretary Gates told him at the Shangri-La Dialogue that their two heads of state reached an important political consensus on improving the military-to-military relationship, Ma reported, and it is up to the two of them to come up with ideas for specific measures.

¶3. (C) LTG Ma described the DCT as the first high-level military-to-military exchange of the Obama administration. Bilateral relations are fairly satisfactory, he observed, but since the London summit there is a need to develop the military component. The DCT can be used to add an improved military-to-military dynamic as a stabilizing element to the overall bilateral relationship. LTG Ma referenced the working level delegation the PLA sent to Washington in advance of the talks as demonstrating the importance both sides attach to the DCT, and urged that this practice be continued.

¶4. (C) USDP thanked LTG Ma for the welcome and referenced his escorting of Secretary Gates during the latter's November 2007 trip to China, as well as LTG Ma's conversations with Secretary Gates at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. Based on LTG Ma's remarks USDP believed both sides were starting out from the same premise, namely the two presidents' agreement to improve the military-to-military component of a positive, cooperative and comprehensive bilateral relationship. The Obama administration is intent on putting the relationship on a more cooperative footing and focusing on shared interests, including Asia-Pacific security, nonproliferation, counterterrorism, and counter piracy, USDP stated. Both sides should come to the talks in this spirit and look for a common way forward for the military-to-military agenda.

¶5. (S) Turning to North Korea, USDP reassured LTG Ma that the U.S. seeks to implement the recent UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) in a responsible and non-confrontational manner, and asked what actions China intends to take to

implement it, given China's proximity to North Korea and the volume of trade across the border. We are at a fork in the road, she stated, and the U.S. is deeply concerned with North Korea's apparent determination to acquire both intercontinental ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons. If North Korea continues down the path it is on, she added, it will lead to regional instability as other countries react. USDP expressed interest in discussing ways the U.S. and China might work together to persuade North Korea not to continue down that path.

¶6. (S) LTG Ma thanked USDP for being very straightforward and for focusing on what is clearly one of the United States' biggest security concerns. He welcomed and approved of the U.S. attitude on taking a responsible and non-confrontational approach on UNSCR 1874. LTG Ma cautioned that he did not want to say too much on this topic as it would be covered the following day, and that the small group should be used for discussing things that are not convenient to talk about in the full DCT session. In principle China is also interested in taking a responsible and non-confrontational approach, LTG Ma commented, adding that China shares the U.S. concerns about potential instability, and that the two sides have no problems or differences on this issue.

¶7. (C) LTG Ma then returned the discussion to the military relationship, and cited three big obstacles in that relationship: 1) Taiwan; 2) U.S. reconnaissance operations; and 3) Section 1201 of the U.S. Congress and the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2000 (NDAA 2000) (which restricts DoD's interactions with the PLA in twelve specific areas).

¶8. (C) We both know the latest suspension in the relationship began with your arms sales to Taiwan last October, LTG Ma stated, and the relationship is still not fully resumed today. He added that some in the U.S. Defense Department claimed China overreacted to this sale, and China has to make these people truly understand its concern. Taiwan arms sales bear on China's most sensitive core interest, LTG Ma claimed, and damage China's sovereignty and security interests. There have been recent positive developments in both cross-Straits relations and in U.S.-China relations, he observed, and warned that both would be undermined by further arms sales. The two sides of the Strait are working toward a formal end to the state of hostility between the two and reaching a peace agreement, LTG Ma continued. Arms sales would send the wrong signal to secessionist forces, and neither side wants to see Taiwan tensions affect the overall U.S.-China strategic relationship, he concluded.

¶9. (C) USDP clarified that the U.S. is pleased to see the reduction of tension across the Strait. The Obama administration is continuing the policy that has been in place for 30 years, based on the One China Policy, Three Joint Communiqués and the Taiwan Relations Act, she stated. There will be no change to these. We would like to see improvement in relations, she continued, and we oppose unilateral actions by any party that would lead to increased tensions. In principle, the U.S. remains supportive of ensuring Taiwan has self defense capabilities, she added. In practice, the new administration has not yet made specific decisions on arms sales. I suggest that we note this as an area of concern and move on to the next topic LTG Ma would like to discuss, USDP advised.

¶10. (C) "I haven't finished." LTG Ma replied. He urged both sides to approach this issue from a political, comprehensive and global strategic perspective. Taiwan arms sales have undermined the foundation for military-to-military relations, he alleged. It is the root cause of the problem, and has created a vicious cycle, he continued. Additional arms sales will cross a red line for China, LTG Ma warned, and China will issue a strong reaction. The U.S. (through Taiwan arms sales) is solely responsible for undermining the foundation of the military-to-military relationship, he

accused, and DoD officials, actions and statements indicate the U.S. doesn't value or cherish that relationship. You are not sincere in cooperating with China, LTG Ma charged, and added that the U.S. cares only about its own interests and concerns and tries to dominate the military-to-military relationship. By calling what China perceives to be its legitimate reaction an overreaction, and by blaming China for missed opportunities, some in DoD are demonstrating contempt for the military-to-military relationship, LTG Ma added.

¶11. (C) If we pursue a defense relationship, LTG Ma continued, we should think about what its purpose is and what kind of principles it should be based on. We are willing to cooperate with you, he added, but not without principles. We value the relationship but we will not beg for it, LTG Ma maintained.

¶12. (C) USDP registered the strong concern LTG Ma expressed on this issue, and explained that the Defense Department would like to find a way to move forward in our relationship with the PLA. We can deal with strong differences in a way that does not prevent us from engaging in a continuous dialogue, she added. Our two presidents have charged us to find a way forward, USDP reminded LTG Ma, and to broaden and deepen cooperation and find common interests even in the face of differences.

¶13. (C) LTG Ma agreed, and hoped that DoD would take a long term perspective, honor its commitments regarding relations with the PLA, and abandon old practices of unilateral domination. USDP interrupted to explain that neither she nor Secretary Gates use words like "hegemony" or "domination" with regard to China. LTG Ma replied that he hopes DoD will play a role in controlling, gradually reducing and stopping U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. DoD's pursuits of a positive military-to-military relationship with the PLA on the one hand and arms sales to Taiwan on the other are mutually exclusive, he alleged. This requires political wisdom on the part of the U.S., LTG Ma added. Regarding high-level exchanges for the remainder of 2009, including Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission General Xu Caihou's visit to the U.S., Secretary Gates' visit to China, and Chief of the Army Staff General Casey's visit to China, the PLA hopes there will not be new arms sales to Taiwan, particularly F-16 C/D or Blackhawk helicopters, LTG Ma warned, adding that a positive climate is required for those visits to proceed.

¶14. (C) USDP explained that the U.S. does not link these two issues in the way LTG Ma suggested. Advancing the military-to-military relationship should be our main focus, she urged, based on common interests and cooperation. China should take a leadership role in improving the cross-Straits dynamic, USDP suggested.

¶15. (C) LTG Ma then turned to the issue of U.S. reconnaissance operations in China's EEZ. "I recognize that these incidents are not in China's territorial waters", LTG Ma said, "but in the EEZ, which is a grey area in legal terms." It is highly likely that miscalculations on either side could spark an incident or an accident, he warned. We signed the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) in 1998, LTG Ma recalled, but over the past 11 years the mechanism failed to play an effective role. China has made a number of representations to the U.S. on the legal perspective, he added. It is an issue of military security and mutual trust. Such intensive, wide-ranging and long-duration reconnaissance missions reflect a Cold War mindset, LTG Ma charged, and are not conducive to a positive, cooperative and comprehensive relationship. Statistically, the frequency and intensity of your missions against China are greater than for any other part of the world, he alleged, and are more intense than the operations the U.S. directed against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. I know what you are doing and why you are doing it, LTG Ma added. But from a strategic perspective, the Cold War has long since ended and cross-Straits tensions are easing; therefore these tactical maneuvers are not consistent with the United States' declared strategic goals. Why then is the

U.S. doing this, LTG Ma asked rhetorically.

¶16. (C) LTG Ma cited Murphy's Law, and noted that British and French submarines have run into each other and a U.S. supply ship once struck a British submarine in the Cape of Good Hope. And this is between allies, he exclaimed. These are international waters and your ships have a right of passage, LTG Ma conceded, but added that China's ships also have rights, and the greater the frequency of U.S. operations, the greater the likelihood of a collision. There is a difference between focusing on gradually reducing and eventually stopping activities, he continued, and on setting up safety measures. They are equally important, LTG Ma declared, and only by combining confidence building measures and safety measures can we appropriately solve the issue. I hope the Defense Department will consider concrete measures such as reducing the frequency of missions or adjusting their "intensity," LTG Ma concluded.

¶17. (C) USDP noted a measure of agreement between the two sides in LTG Ma's remarks, in that both the U.S. and China exercise freedom of navigation rights in international waters. The U.S. ability to operate in China's EEZ is critical to our situational awareness in Asia, where we have key national interests, she advised. We share your concern over accidents and incidents, USDP added, and we need to revitalize the MMCA to enable it to deal with these when they arise. We are pleased that in recent incidents both sides have taken care that the situation does not escalate, USDP continued. I share your interest in confidence building measures, she added, and the U.S. would like to see greater transparency and openness in China's military as a means of building confidence. Because of our democratic system the U.S. is very transparent and open, as is evidenced in our reports to Congress, USDP observed. The more open both sides can be transparent, the more confidence and mutual understanding can be built over time, she concluded. Some of China's activities, in particular the development of anti-satellite and anti-ship capabilities cause concern in the U.S. because we don't know what you are doing, USDP explained, adding that a dialogue on these issues would contribute to understanding.

¶18. (C) LTG Ma insisted the U.S. maintains two different standards for transparency. Someone recently told him that DoD is suggesting that NDAA 2000 makes the U.S. more transparent, an idea he found to be incredible.

¶19. (C) USDP explained that 1) Congress is an independent branch of the U.S. government, and will write legislation the way it sees fit, and 2) the Secretary of Defense makes a determination as to whether a potential activity can proceed. There is much more we can do within the parameters of the legislation, USDP continued. Growth in the relationship, and a demonstration of meaningful cooperation between our two militaries, could also change the views of some in Congress overtime, USDP said.

¶20. (U) U.S. Participants:

Michele Flournoy, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
Michael Schiffer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia
Xanthi Carras, Office of the Secretary of Defense Country Director for China
Jim Brown, Interpreter

¶21. (U) PRC Participants:

Lieutenant General Ma Xiaotian, Deputy Chief of the PLA General Staff
Major General Qian Lihua, Director, Ministry of National Defense Foreign Affairs Office (MND/FAO)
Lieutenant Colonel Wu Qian, Staff Officer, MND/FAO
Lieutenant Colonel Chu Weiwei, Interpreter, MND/FAO

¶22. (U) Under Secretary Flournoy has cleared this cable.

